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ABSTRACT

Creative reading can develop creative thinking as it inspires readers to change their behavior to produce a new or different product or process. Some characteristics of a creative reading program are that it develops creative thought, develops creative behavior, avoids rigid conformity, provides satisfying reading experiences, gives the child opportunities to practice creative powers, and encourages constructive criticism and tolerance. The success of a creative reading program depends on how thoroughly a teacher rewards creative thinking and encourages children to value their own thoughts and ideas. Four areas that need consideration for developing creative reading are: types of reading material, ways of structuring questions and discussion, tasks that open doors, and response environments that encourage creative behavior. Materials should have interesting language patterns, unfinished imaginative stories, biographies, interesting characters and situations, and should give practice in drawing analogies. (TJ)

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UNLEASHING CREATIVE THINKING: THE CREATIVE READING WAY

Teaching reading is an active, vital process which utilizes varied approaches, novel ideas, purposeful designs and promising practices.

Much of what teachers do in the teacher-pupil learning situation results from experiences, instincts and training.

Reassessment of the process, therefore, becomes ongoing as teachers adjust and readjust teaching styles, sometimes on a daily or weekly basis. Readjustment of procedures to accommodate pupils' needs, interest and abilities afford unusual opportunities for creativity.

One promising aspect of creative reading is the development of creative thinkers. Inasmuch as the writer perceives creative thinking to be a critical skill for today and tomorrow's world; teachers might assess their total reading program to insure inclusion of creative reading.

Many reading programs deal essentially with reading as a receptive rather than a creative process. Yet it is the behavior of the learner which goes beyond word identification or even literal understanding that is important.

When creative reading focuses on producing creative thinkers, new ideas are created and old ones criticized. In the process, uniqueness evolves in both teacher and pupil behavior. This writer supports the belief that today's complex world would profit greatly from and thrive with vitality if such an approach is utilized.

CS004 719

Creative reading, then appears to be a necessary component in a strong reading program for today's world. It is a component that can be easily neglected because of the many secular and professional forces impinging on teachers. It is easier, for one thing, to deal almost exclusively with word attack skills, oral reading, etc.; all segments of reading that parents and evaluators can deal with easily. Secondly, teachers today are bombarded with tests; pretests, posttests, state mandated tests, district tests, etc. Most of these test evaluate cognition and convergent thinking. Creative reading deals greatly with divergent thinking, thinking most tests don't assess.

Today's pressures might stagger us, but should not deter from enriching our reading program in a manner that develops creative thinking. Creative reading offers one such possibility.

What then is creative reeding? Smith (3) suggests creative reading is more than a reader tapping past experiences to reassemble ideas into new meaning. It is reading that inspires the reader to change his behavior in some way so as to produce a new or different product. A creative reader reads a book on flower arrangement. When he or she finishes reading he or she does more than duplicate an arrangement in the book. He experiments with other designs, thereby making an original flower arrangement of his own.

Teachers, however, should be aware that a creative reader's thinking does not always result in a product. It may result in a process, which the reader doesn't necessarily convey outwardly.

Torrance (4) offers further insight into creative reading through his delineation of creative thinking, an integral part of the creative reading process. He notes that creative thinking is a strategy that

a. implies creating something new, something which one has never seen or something which has never existed;

b. involves adventurous thinking, getting away from the main track, breaking out of the mold;

c. represents a successful step into the unknown and in the process one thing leads to another;

d. includes invention, discovery, curiosity, imagination, experimentation, exploration;

e. enables creative ideas to become evident in inventions, theories, improved products, peoms, novels, etc.

Delineation of the creative reading process reveals its importance and significance. Creative reading is important because it encourages creative thinking. Creative thinking enhances the dynamics of problem solving. The complex social, political, economic, and religious problems abounding today demand solutions. Tomorrow's world will present even more demanding problems. Today and tomorrow need active participants. Creative thinkers are active participants.

Creative thinkers are imaginative. They explore a vast number of possibilities. Expanding the mind to explore and test unusual ideas is not threatening to a creative thinker. They can risk being different. If a different solution emerges as a viable one, the intellectual and personal reward is great. Issues, such as the energy crisis, pollution and way demand a future nation of people who will blend their knowledge, creative thinking and imagination to solve problems that threaten the very existence of the human race. The issues of our time and future time require men who dare to offer different and unusual solutions.

Creative thinkers evidence good mental health. They can deal with fantasy and reality in a creative and productive way. They can experience the joys and tears of fantasy expressed on and off the written page. They can even create fantasy and reality of their own, thereby personally enriching their lives and experiences. Flexibility of thought and action is evidenced by the creative thinker, thus enabling him to adapt and adjust easily.

Creative thinking is one of the necessary skills for quality living.

Teachers cognizant of this might actively participate in producing future generations of quality thinkers. To do so might consider the development of a reading program that fosters creative reading.

Some of the characteristics evident in a good creative reading program as determined by Smith (2) are:

a. develops creative thought as one of the objectives

b. plans purposefully to develop creative behavior

c. emphasizes discovery and self-learning

d. avoids rigid conformity

e. provides satisfying reading experiences

f. gives the child opportunities to practice creative powers

In large measure, the success of a creative reading program is directly related to how thoroughly that teacher rewards and appreciates creative thinking. A classroom climate that exudes such a teacher feeling and fascination about creative reading encourages and nurtures creative thinking.

Developing creative thought not only requires teachers to value creative thinking; it encourages children to value their own thoughts and ideas. Brainstorming is an activity that merits inclusion in the reading program. It encourages production of many ideas no matter how "way out" and naturally sitmulates thinking.

Purposeful planning insures the inclusion of activities and experiences that stimulate creative behavior in the reading program. Turner and Alexander (5) suggest four areas that need careful consideration for the development of creative reading:

1. The types of reading materials which provide the best stimulators for creative thinking;
2. Ways of structuring oral questions and discussions that will arouse children to think creatively about reading;

3. Reading tasks that will open rather than close doors to productive creative thoughts;
4. Types of "response environment" that will encourage creative behavior.

Reading materials that stimulate imagination and curiosity encourages creative thinking. The following kinds of materials should be evident in the program: (1) selections that have interesting language patterns, such as dialect, vivid descriptions; (2) imaginative stories that are unfinished permitting children to supply the ending; (3) biographies, for they permit a student to read beyond what the author intended and adds character development; (4) selections with interesting characters and situations; (5) books that expose children to questions; and (6) materials that give children practice in drawing on analogies.

The creative reading program should have built into it opportunities for students to respond and react to the written page. Oral questions and discussions can be structured to stimulate awareness and arouse students to think creatively about what was read.

Sullivan (3) notes questions should be structured so as to liberate and expand the mind. Liberating and mind-expanding questions have two key characteristics. They are open-ended and they do not limit children to a single response. Rather, they give children a chance to examine all possibilities. Such questions permit students to invent, fantasize, speculate, discover and relate ideas to one's own personal ideas.

The ways in which reading tasks are structured gives clues as to how valuable creative reading is perceived to be by a teacher. Reading tasks should opens doors to creative thought and expression. This can be achieved by structuring tasks that are diverse and challenging.

Diversity and challenge enhance the depth of the creative thinking process.

Reading choices should allow students to respond in a variety of ways; oral and written, musically and artistically, affectively and cognitively.

The creative reading environment is a caring environment. It cares about the individual. It cares about how good each student feels about himself and his ideas. It cares about each and every student having a physical enviornment that is non-threatening and purposeful. It cares about rewarding students for their creative thoughts. It cares about supporting each and every student's right to express an unusual or new idea. It cares about being a rich, stimulating enviornment.

This caring environment evidences two creative behaviors that appear conducive to a climate that fosters creative thinking. They are constructive criticism and tolerance. Constructive criticism involves both criticism and solution. To criticize and offer possible ways to correct or improve that flaw gives hope, conveys genuine concern and feeling for the receiver of the criticism. Receptivity to the speaker is enhanced and creative production possible. It further stimulates more ideas for consideration. An atmosphere such as this should permeate the classroom setting for it encourages expression of ideas rather than stifles them. Teaching students to criticize constructively rewards humanistic creative thinking.

A classroom setting that permits and encourages tolerance to new, different or unusal ideas sets a tone for creative production. This is accomplished to a larger degree by the teacher actively protecting minority ideas and solutions to problems. A teacher who protects unusual ideas encourages production of new and different ideas. Ridicule has no place in this setting. This protecting of ideas, no doubt stimulates the quality of creative responses.

Satisfying reading experiences are housed in a creative reading program. They liberate students to communicate ideas. They give credence to divergent

thinking which opens the way for new solutions to problems. Experiences that introduce possibilities for divergent thinking require time. Creativity often comes slowly. A teacher needs to provide the necessary time for teaching creative reading. Satisfying reading experiences will probably evoke student experimentation with his creative powers.

Ultimately, the creative reading program gives students many opportunities to practice using his creative powers. Students then must be liberated to express themselves in a variety of ways, not emphasizing one area of growth over another. Students must practice thinking creatively for themselves.

Developing and encouraging creative thinkers is a demanding yet rewarding task. It demands time and initiative; but it can unleash unlimited possibilities that will insure and enrich a productive, creative nation of people. Such a lofty goal commands the dedication of reading teachers to the development of creative reading programs.

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